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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Discussion guide for the high-level round table on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Note by the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women

I. Background

1. At its forty-sixth session, held in 2002, the Commission on the Status of Women introduced the option of high-level round tables at its annual sessions to provide further opportunities for sharing national experiences (decision 46/101). It authorized the Bureau to decide on the number, timing and theme of any such round tables, subsequent to consultation with all interested Member States through the regional groups.

2. At its fiftieth session, held in 2006, the Commission decided that the annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and

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good practices in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme.[1]

3. In its resolution 2009/15, the Economic and Social Council decided that in 2010, at its fifty-fourth session, the Commission would review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

4. The outcome of the Commission's consideration of this topic at its fifty-fourth session will provide a contribution to both the annual ministerial review of the Economic and Social Council in July 2010, which will focus on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women", and the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in 2010.

II. Organizational matters

Theme

5. The high-level round table will focus on the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Participants

6. The high-level round table provides an opportunity for high-level representatives of Member States attending the fifty-fourth session of the Commission to engage in dialogue and share experiences and lessons learned. The high-level representatives may include: ministers of women's affairs; heads of national mechanisms for gender equality; and senior officials from other relevant ministries, such as those of development, foreign affairs, labour, finance, justice, education, health and the environment, as well as national statistical offices.

7. The high-level round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers. A number of invited senior officials from entities of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council will also have an opportunity to participate in the dialogue.

Timing

8. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 1 March 2010, from 3 to 6 p.m.

Format

9. The high-level round table will be chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission, Garen Nazarian (Armenia).

10. In order to promote the interactivity of the round table, the Chairperson will guide the discussions in a proactive manner. Interventions shall not exceed three

[1] Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, para. 4.

minutes. Speakers will be encouraged to ask questions and offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

11. The first half of the high-level round table will consist of a discussion among high-level representatives of Member States. During the second half, invited senior officials of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations will participate in the discussions.

Outcome

12. The outcome of the high-level round table will be a summary by the Chairperson.

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

13. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, provides the global policy framework for women's human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform for Action covers 12 critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health; violence against women; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights; media; the environment; and the girl child. For each critical area of concern, strategic objectives were identified under which actions to be taken by Governments and other stakeholders, at the national, regional and international levels, were outlined.

14. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), adopted by the General Assembly at the Millennium Summit in 2000, Member States confirmed their resolve to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. They also resolved to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

15. Eight Millennium Development Goals, derived from the Millennium Declaration and the outcomes of the global conferences of the 1990s, were subsequently developed. The Goals include a series of time-bound and measurable targets for advancing development and reducing poverty by 2015 or earlier. The Goals are to: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1); achieve universal primary education (Goal 2); promote gender equality and empower women (Goal 3); reduce child mortality (Goal 4); improve maternal health (Goal 5); combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6); ensure environmental sustainability (Goal 7); and develop a global partnership for development (Goal 8).[2]

16. While Goal 3 specifically focuses on gender equality and empowerment of women, there are clear gender equality dimensions in all the MDGs. There is broad recognition that gender equality is both a goal in itself as well as a means towards the achievement of all of the Goals. Conversely, the achievement of the Goals has implications for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

[2] A/59/2005, box 1.

17. Although these linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals are increasingly recognized at a policymaking level, further work is needed to translate this awareness into concrete action. Recent evidence demonstrates that progress for women and girls under the Goals, as well as overall progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, has been very uneven and has produced inadequate results, including in areas such as poverty reduction, provision of full employment and decent work, education, including literacy, and maternal health.

18. Available statistics provide evidence of limited or even a lack of progress in many areas. For example, there have been marked increases in hunger in all of the world's major regions, and more than 1 billion people are now estimated to be undernourished.[3] Women are more likely to be undernourished than men as they tend to have disproportionate access to food, especially when it is scarce. Despite shrinking estimates of the number of girls out of school, girls continue to account for the majority of children out of school and women remain a majority of those who are classified as illiterate. In addition, the existing gap between enrolment and school attendance demonstrates the need to look beyond enrolment and parity rates, which can mask high levels of exclusion.[4] Access to labour markets and to decent work remains particularly limited for women, with a large share of women in vulnerable employment.[5] Every year, an estimated 210 million women suffer from life-threatening complications of pregnancy, often leading to serious disability, and a further half a million women die in pregnancy or at or shortly after childbirth, nearly all of them in developing countries. Research has shown that around 80 per cent of maternal deaths could be prevented if women had access to essential maternity and basic health-care services.[6]

19. Multiple global crises, including the economic and financial crisis, the food and energy crises and the challenge of climate change, have had an adverse impact on the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and have raised doubts about current approaches to development. It is, therefore, an opportune time to rethink and modify policy approaches, strategies and actions to ensure a more equitable, gender-sensitive and sustainable pattern of growth and development.

20. Fifteen years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and with the target dates for the Millennium Development Goals fast approaching, there is increased urgency to identify concrete ways of shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Goals and to sharpen the focus on the practical realization of the principle of the equality of women and men.

21. Without specific attention to the gender equality aspects of all the Millennium Development Goals, there is a limited likelihood of achieving the targets overall.

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[3] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2009* (Rome, 2009).

[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report: Overcoming inequality: why governance matters*, 2009 (UNESCO, Paris, 2008).

[5] *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women's Control over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources, including Microfinance* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.IV.7).

[6] "Achieving maternal and sexual reproductive health", expert paper prepared by Tomris Türmen, 2009.

B. Discussion guide

22. During the round table, high-level representatives from Member States are expected to focus on achievements and on gaps and challenges in linking the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

23. Participants may wish to consider providing information, based on their national experiences, on actions taken, lessons learned and good or promising practices in relation to the following issues:

(a) Policies, programmes and actions that have been successful in linking global policy and legal frameworks on gender equality (the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) with the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals;

(b) Effective use of the Millennium Development Goals to strengthen national efforts to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women;

(c) Effective use of national gender equality policies and action plans to strengthen national efforts to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals;

(d) Measures to enhance capacity at the national level for collecting and analysing sex- and age-disaggregated data to more effectively monitor and evaluate the impact on women and girls of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;

(e) The role of national mechanisms for gender equality and civil society in strengthening and fully utilizing the linkages between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

(f) Strategies for increasing resources to ensure attention to gender perspectives in all policies, strategies and plans for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.